

THE CHURCH AND PEOPLE OF SCOTLAND, 1645-1660 :

INFLUENCES AND CONDITIONS

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THIS period in the history of Religion in Scotland, which is now to be considered, although fairly well known to students, has not drawn many to take in hand to write about it. Consequently to most people its movements and events are not very familiar. And in any case it does not so readily attract popular interest. It lacks the particular picturesqueness and romance of the subsequent times when there were the unequal battles, the moorland preachings, and the martyrdoms, of the Covenanting Church in the Wilderness. Yet subjects for romance could be found in all sufficiency to those who would follow its complicated and stirring affairs. During the half of it there was much turmoil in the land. For Church and State, the whole period was a time of profound crises. To the Scottish Reformed Church it became a melancholy and tragic period. In it the Church was subjected to severe testing owing to the political circumstances of the times, and, weakened by divisions within itself, was unable to maintain itself against its adversaries.

I

The Second Reformation, after the Assemblies of Glasgow in 1638 and of Edinburgh in 1639, had got well under way. The enthusiastic signing of the National Covenant had prepared the country for the holding of these Assemblies, and had given a great impetus to the work of restoring the Reformed Church. The original Reformation Ideal republished by Alexander Henderson and others, had been gladly adopted and carried out as far as possible. That "Ideal" was for a Reformed Church in a Reformed Land, and that meant a National Church of the Presbyterian Order, and a people reformed in their morals, and made good and intelligent Christians of a Presbyterian character. It carried along with it the claim of the Church to have a strict supervision over the morals and beliefs of the people, and by its discipline to restrain evil of every kind. The accepted activities of the Church were for the purpose of drilling the people in wholesome morals and sound doctrine, and to win them to the

worthy holding and following of the great truths of the Christian Faith. It was an admirable ideal in its way.

It was no wonder that the "Ideal" in its fresh promulgation stirred the enthusiasm of our Scottish religious leaders and a large proportion of the people. The enthusiasm was of such a kind that it moved the leaders not only to carry it out for Scotland, but to make the attempt to promote it in England and Ireland too. Of course there was no thought, as some have asserted, of forcing its acceptance upon England and Ireland, but rather of persuading these two countries to adopt it. As a matter of fact, in England there were already movements and tendencies to encourage the Scots to proceed. Thus hopefully efforts could be started for effecting a uniformity in religion for all three countries of the British Isles along the lines desired. This was not such an unheard of scheme as might appear. Charles I had planned for uniformity by means of a prelatic church. This was to be through a Reformed or Presbyterian Church.

The great preparatory product of this vision of the Scottish church leaders was "The Solemn League and Covenant" which contained an agreement to abolish Prelacy and to establish Presbytery in the National Churches. It was signed by State and Church authorities of all the three countries, and largely by the people. Naturally in Ireland it was only among the Protestants that it was adopted, but those who signed it did so without any compulsion.

So far, so good. The realisation of the uniformity in religion seemed to be promising. Moreover, shortly before the official signing in England of "The Solemn League and Covenant," the Westminster Assembly of Divines, chiefly composed of Presbyterian ministers, for the settling of the affairs of religion in the land, had begun its sittings.

But ere this Assembly had finished its work and brought to an end its sessions in 1649, the accomplishing of the desired uniformity in religion in the British Isles was appearing much less hopeful. The constituting of the Church of England according to the Presbyterian polity had been but very partially brought about, and the progress of it seemed to be coming to a standstill.

Opposition had arisen. There were the Independents who believed in having little or no church organisation beyond that of a congregation. Some of them were members of the Westminster Assembly, and, although they agreed more or less with the doctrinal decisions of the Assembly, they vigorously opposed the proposals for setting up the Presbyterian system. In the Assembly itself, because they were few in number, they were not able to make their views to prevail; outside, however, they were becoming more numerous and influential. Oliver Cromwell was inclined to favour them, and he was gaining an ever increasing power in the State. Ecclesiastically he was a latitudinarian. We are told that there

are not many statues of Oliver in England. There is one in Manchester. It stands in an open space near what is now the cathedral. Quite appropriately, considering that he was no favourer of ecclesiasticism, intentionally or unintentionally, Oliver has been placed with his back to the great church. Naturally he felt himself more in sympathy with the loose church-views of the Independents. So his influence and method of dealing with church affairs went against the reorganisation of the Church of England on Presbyterian or on any very definite lines. His views on national religion were probably in general those set forth in the document for England called "The Agreement of the People," which was issued in 1647, and again, a much different composition, in 1649. The early version of this was deplorably vague with regard to national religion. The later version presents what is much more definite and admirable so far as it goes, but much short of Presbyterian order. It is as well to remember all this in view of Cromwell's close connection with Scotland later.

The set-back to the Presbyterian cause in England would no doubt be very disappointing to the Scottish church leaders. Yet in Scotland circumstances were by no means unfavourable to the fuller carrying out of their "Ideal" of a Reformed Church in a Reformed Land. The Westminster Assembly finished its great labours. It issued all its ecclesiastical documents. These were, the Directory for Public Worship (1645), the Form of Presbyterial Church Government (1645), The Confession of Faith (1647), and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms (1648). All were approved of, and accepted by, the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. In addition a Metrical Psalter had come out from the Westminster Assembly which the Church of Scotland took in hand to make worthier and more suitable for Public Worship.

It has been said and repeated that our Scottish Church made great sacrifices in the cause of uniformity, giving up its own old Confession of Faith for the Westminster Confession, and its Book of Common Order for the "Directory," and its own old Psalm Book for a new one. This was not really the case. The Scottish Confession of the Reformation was not discarded. There was no need for that. G. G. M'Crie points out that it was virtually continued in the Covenants. As a matter of fact the National Covenant falls back on it for support, and reaffirms adherence to it—"the Confession of our Faith, established and publicly confirmed by sundry Acts of Parliament. . . . To the which Confession and Form of Religion we willingly agree in our conscience in all points as unto God's undoubted truth and verity and grounded only upon His Written Word." But now additionally the Scottish Church became possessed of a new Confession, one which was amongst the finest of the Confessional Symbols emanating from the Reformed Churches, and which brought along with it its two most valuable Catechisms. As for the Book of Common Order,

it had in the main fallen into disuse, and for some time there had been a move for the bringing out of another guide to Public Worship.

Thus the Church of Scotland was anew equipped to go forward. Those latest excellent ecclesiastical documents and a new Psalter could not fail to have a profound effect upon the Church's life and practice, as well as on the general religious life of the people. The new Confession and the Larger Catechism would help to clarify and fix the theology of ministers. What the Shorter Catechism effected is well known. Previously following the Reformation there had been catechisms for use among the people, but only partially introduced, and there had been no definitive one. Now the Shorter Catechism was definitely accepted for popular use, and especially for catechising the young people. It made Scotland to become, if not a nation of theologians, at least a people grounded in the elements of theological thought. We may think, too, it contributed to prevent the people of Scotland, at the time when it came out, from being carried away by the various strange, grotesque, and fantastic religious notions which were laying hold of not a few in England.

The Form of Presbyterian Church-Government was not required in Scotland. It had, in fact, been largely dependent for its drawing up on what already was functioning in Scotland. Yet it could serve to confirm the Church in its constitution and be an extra safeguard against a falling away again into Prelacy.

The Directory for Public Worship provided a trustworthy guide to the ministers of the Church in carrying out their duties as leaders of the religious exercises of the congregation. Although not furnishing definite prayers to be read by the officiating minister, in the manner of the English Book of Common Prayer, or even so much as the Scottish Book of Common Order, yet it gave more careful directions for the conduct of Public Worship than the latter, and, in some respects, than even the former. Its deep and serious reverence was well fitted to promote a right devotional atmosphere for a worshipping people. It could convey not a little of the Puritan gift of the vision of God.

Then there was the Metrical Psalter. Rous's version had been brought from England for examination. It was used as a kind of basis for producing another version, much revised and amended, and much superior to Rous's. This superseded the old Scottish metrical Psalter which had been in use since the Reformation. It was intended to be nearer the original Hebrew in its renderings; and what was of more practical importance, its metres were made simpler and more uniform. In consequence of the latter a few tunes would be sufficient for the whole Psalter, a consideration worth while in times when there would be little musical efficiency in congregations. It would conduce to the singing of the

Psalms by a whole congregation, and not merely by a precentor and choir.

- The devotional value of singing in Public Worship is immense. The use of the Psalms, too, in some form, metrical or prose, is a most valuable constituent of congregational praise. One can regard it as a defect in the Public Worship of a large proportion of the congregation of the Free Churches of England that the singing of the Psalms finds no place. Yet the use of them might not be all to the good. One wonders whether, after the new Scottish Psalter had been authorised in 1650, all the Psalms were sung, the imprecatory ones as well as the others, or if judicious selection was made, as is done now. There are some very violent and fierce passages in several Psalms. Take, for example, a number of verses of Psalm cii, and others with similar sentiments in other Psalms :

“ Their teeth, O God, within their mouth,
break Thou in pieces small ;
The great tooth break Thou out, O Lord,
of these young lions all.” Ps. lviii, 6.

or again :

“ O daughter, thou of Babylon,
near to destruction ;
Blest shall he be that thee rewards,
as thou to us hast done.
Yea, happy surely shall he be
thy tender little ones
Who shall lay hold upon, and them
shall dash against the stones.” Ps. cxxxvii, 8, 9.

If such portions of the Psalms were more or less often sung, we could understand whence came some of the influences which produced a certain fierceness in the religious life of the people. Apart from all considerations of this kind, however, with regard to the use of the Psalms in general in Public Worship, most valuable as that use is, it has never to be forgotten that the Psalms, after all, belong to the old Covenant. Their sole employment in the praise of the congregation will tend to produce or favour what might be a too strongly pronounced Hebrew type of piety. It may partly account for the very strong Old Testament sentiments and practices which were noticeable in the Reformed Churches of the 17th century, the Psalm-singing churches. The use of the Psalms needs to be supplemented and counterbalanced by that of Christian hymns inspired by the full Christian revelation. The church folk of the 17th century had no such rich collections of these as are possessed by the churches to-day. So they, dependent on the Psalms alone for their praise in Public Worship, must not be blamed for any imperfections in their

Christian sentiments which might be due to that. Of course the praise did not form as large a part in the services of our period as it does now. The "Directory" appears only to suggest the singing of two Psalms in a service.

In following up the consideration of what affected the Church and the general religious life of the people of this period, we may just give a passing glance at the possible effects of the abolition of patronage in the Church. This was brought about in 1649. For the Church to be free from Patronage in the appointment of its ministers had belonged to the Scottish Reformation Ideal. Knox and the Books of Discipline had intended that there should be no lay patrons with the right of the presentation of ministers to vacant charges. Now when patronage was done away with, although the method adopted of filling up a vacancy was not that of popular election, it gave congregations some share in the choice of their ministers. This would stimulate an increased interest on the part of the people in their own parish kirk, and, to some small extent perhaps, in the Church as a whole throughout the land.

II

One of the most important things, however, in its effect upon the religious life of the country, and upon the affairs of the Church people both religiously and politically, was the influence of the two Covenants, the National Covenant and the Solemn League and Covenant. These had moved the feelings of the people very deeply. The keeping to the terms of them was supposed to be imposed on their hearts and consciences. And very faithfully many did try to hold by them. They were declared by some to be perpetually binding. For one affirmation of this we may quote from a communication called "A Solemn and Seasonable Warning" from the Commission of the General Assembly to the Scottish Parliament and all the people, of date, 17th Decr., 1646, as follows: "Both nations have covenanted with God, and each of them with another, in things most lawfull and necessary for the preservation and good of both without any limitation of time: And therfor we and our posterity ar oblieged before God unto the observation therof 'as long as the sun and moon shall endure.'" (*Comm. Records*, p. 151.)

Naturally as time went on the hold of the Covenants upon the people tended to slacken. In 1648 the Commission of the General Assembly thought it advisable to have a renewal of the Solemn League and Covenant. It was ordered that on the second Sunday of December, along with a Fast, the Covenant should be read in the churches, and thereafter be sworn to by the people. Further, in 1649, the General Assembly

enacted that all Freshmen and Graduates at the Colleges, and all Catechumens, must sign the Covenant.

Of course there were always those who were averse from the Covenants. With not a few, compulsion was used to obtain their signatures. Some who were secretly "Malignants" worked underhandedly against the Solemn League and Covenant. According to that "Warning" which has already been quoted from, secret "Malignants" could be detected by their slandering of the Covenant of the three nations. In spite of all that was contrary, the influence of the Covenants continued strong in Scotland right up to the time of the Restoration. At his execution, James Guthrie declared his standing had been, and still was, upon them.

So much at least can be said for them, that for some years they bound the most of the people in Scotland together with common religious and political aims. In particular, moreover, the Solemn League and Covenant brought Scotland and England into closer relations than they had ever known before. It might reasonably be believed that that religious and political treaty in some measure prepared the way for the subsequent Union more than 50 years later.

Sad to say, however, the very Covenants which were meant to bind together, and worked that way for a time, had elements in them which were divisive, and, to anticipate later events, proved so. On this point one cannot do better than quote the forcible language of Carlyle: "The meaning of the Scotch Covenant was, that God's divine Law of the Bible should be put into practice in these nations. . . . But then the Covenant says expressly, there is to be a Stuart King in the business: we cannot do without our Stuart King! Given a divine Law of the Bible on one hand, and a Stuart King, Charles First or Charles Second, on the other: alas, did History ever present a more irreducible case of equations in this world? I pity the poor Scotch Pedant Governors: still more the poor Scotch People, who had no other to follow!" Put in another way, the insertion in the Covenants of loyalty to the Stuart kings of the 17th century, was quite incompatible with the promotion of what was considered to be the Scriptural Ideal of a Reformed Church in a Reformed Land, which the main body of the Covenants was meant to secure.

III

It goes without saying that the Bible was in constant use by most of the people of all classes. According to the commonly accepted use of the times the Old and New Testaments were appealed to exactly in the same way. Warrant for Christian conduct and belief could be found as

readily in the Old Testament as in the New. Indeed the teaching of the Old Testament was accepted in such a way as sometimes to neutralise that of the New Testament. It was through this use of the Bible that there was firmly held the view that God outwardly rewards the righteous nation by success in peace or war, and always outwardly brings disaster upon the godless nation. When dangers threatened, God must be won over to grant His help and favour and deliverance to the nation. Whenever there were losses or disasters, here were sure signs that God was angry and wrathful with His people, and must be appeased. Of course there was a considerable element of truth in these beliefs, but they needed to be delivered from their crudeness in the light of the Christian Gospel. By reason of them the people all over the land were summoned to observe Fasts whenever difficult and critical affairs had arisen or were threatening. It is remarkable how readily members of the Government, the ministers of the Church, and all classes of the people fell in with these demands. One cannot say with what degree of sincerity the Fasts were observed. Probably with many the observance would be merely outward and according to regulation. With many others there would be true repentance, and mourning before God and a humble imploring of his help and favour. For all, the times of the Fasts would be somewhat dismal and dreary. Yet one can hardly think that there would fail to be some spiritual gain to the people by their acknowledging in common that they believed God to be the ruler and arbiter of their national affairs.

We are called upon then to think of a people in Scotland at this time, as having working upon them influences coming from a revived Confession of Faith with its Catechisms, from a revised way of conducting Public Worship leading to careful behaviour and reverence, and enriched with praise from a Psalter adapted to the attainments of ordinary congregations, and influences from Covenants solemnly made before God, and from frequent acknowledgement of God in national concerns through days of fasting. All the people ought to have been greatly stirred religiously. But alas ! however much grace abounds, there are always those who are impervious to it. In spite of all advantages, many in the population were debased and degraded. One only needs to read Synod and Presbytery Records, Diaries and other accounts, to be made acquainted with this fact. Of course we must not think that the cases coming up before the civil and ecclesiastical courts indicate the character of the people as a whole, though it is to be noted that there were many of them in proportion to the population. Unhappily there is other evidence which shows a not inconsiderable part of the people to have been godless and coarse. The Scottish soldiers were drawn from all classes, and with many of them morals were bad, and they were evil-tongued and thievish. Yet here it must be considered that the morals of armies and soldiers were not a sure

indication of the moral and religious state of the classes from which the armies had been drawn. Civilian ways were on a higher level than what the military mode of life only too easily produced. But when all is said, in the period we are considering, owing to the disturbed state of the country, with armies like those of Montrose, drawn from the baser elements of Ireland and Scotland, marching here and there, there was much which was not conducive to a high morality among the people.

On the other hand, in contrast with only too prevalent vices, it has to be said that the religious influences worked powerfully throughout the land. There was often a hot zeal that we are strangers to. Religious doctrines and practices were common subjects of conversation. What has been called "the language of Canaan," the speaking in Biblical, theological, and devotional language, was freely used not only in church matters, but in political and State affairs, and in everyday life. It might sound to us over sanctimonious and wanting in sincerity. It certainly could easily be learned and that to be used hypocritically. Charles II knew well how to speak it, as also men like Middleton, Lauderdale and James Sharpe. But if there is a counterfeiting, it is because there is that which is genuine and valuable. So it was with many who spoke in language which seems to us too sanctimonious; there was a genuine and earnest religious feeling behind this mode of speech. Many so speaking were deeply religious people, sincere in word, truly earnest and zealous. The Covenants themselves also had stirred up an emotional zeal, which in some cases turned into fanaticism. There was also a certain type of piety which was not so healthy, being too introspective. Such is revealed in the diaries of Alexander Brodie, Johnston of Warriston, and Fraser of Brea. Introspective it might be, yet it could show that there was a deep spiritual life within. Family worship was observed in the homes of the humbler classes as well as in those of the wealthier. For those who could read, probably a fair proportion of the population in the Lowlands, although from the lack of any standard spelling it must have been more difficult to learn, there were books of theology and devotion obtainable and much controversial literature which was quite capable of instructing the people about religious matters. From England also a wealth of religious literature was provided. The Puritan Divines had brought in a golden age of theological and devotional writings. Their works were read in Scotland. It would be interesting to compile a list of those mentioned as having been read by our Diarists. It would contain a considerable number of titles.

We have ample evidence, too, that multitudes of the people had a hungering after the Word of God, and because of a general feeling of insufficiency in themselves, partly induced by thoughts of the times being out of joint, and that there were many crying evils, they were ready

to welcome the Gospel wherever they could hear it. Happily, although there seem to have been many unworthy men in the ministry, all over, in different parts of the country, there were ministers who knew what the Gospel is, and were eager and eloquent in proclaiming it. Revivals of religion took place here and there, and a general raising of the spiritual atmosphere in other places where there was not actually what is called a revival.

Where there was much warmth of religious feeling we find it seeking the better to maintain itself and to express itself. It did so in ways that passed beyond what was provided by the stated ordinances of the Church. There arose, what we have to call for want of a better name, "Private Meetings." Devout people gathered together in houses or elsewhere for devotional exercises, and to hear an exposition of Scripture given by a leader of the meeting. This kind of gathering seems to have had its origin in Northern Ireland. If this was not precisely the case, at any rate zealous Christians who had been in those parts formed such meetings in Scotland. There is no reason to suppose, however, that meetings of the kind could not have arisen in Scotland apart from any outside influences. Now one of these meetings in particular, which was carried on in Stirling under the leadership of the Laird of Leckie, attracted much attention and opposition. One of the ministers of Stirling, Henry Guthrie, took bitter offence at its proceedings. According to Baillie, by the help of the Presbytery and the magistrates of the town, with vehemency and some violence, he tried to suppress it. He endeavoured to calumniate Leckie and those associated with him. He appealed to the Assembly against Leckie's and all such meetings. He ought not to have been given much consideration by the Assembly, for he was by no means an admirable person. He was a time-server. Although a royalist-prelatist at heart, he had signed the Covenant. Afterwards at the Restoration he conformed to Prelacy and became Bishop of Dunkeld. Over the whole of the Stirling case he showed a very bad spirit. It was the Assembly in Aberdeen, held in 1640, which first took up the matter of the "Private Meetings." It recommended that they be discontinued, and that no more of the kind be held other than those of members of a family for family worship. The matter was more decidedly dealt with again at the Assembly of 1647, when acts were passed to suppress these meetings. Among the early disapprovers of them had been Alexander Henderson, but there were always good and eminent men who favoured them, Robert Blair, John McLellan, John Livingston, David Dickson, and Samuel Rutherford being among them. It may surprise us that religious meetings of this kind were opposed by any good men and suppressed by church authority. We are so accustomed to meetings of all kinds which are either with or without the supervision of the Church. Prejudices and misrepresentations may have had to do with

the opposition to gatherings which to us appear at any rate harmless, and probably were beneficial and helpful. Baillie speaks of them as arising in Ireland and to have been carried on there by some who were inclined to Brownism and Independency. That was sufficient to raise an antagonism to them in Scotland as being tainted by the "Sectaries." Baillie appears to have been misinformed. There was as much opposition in Northern Ireland to those who were called "Sectaries" as in Scotland. The men who were the promoters of these meetings in Ireland were those who had suffered for their adherence to the Presbyterian cause. The Laird of Leckie himself had been one of them. But Baillie was prejudiced. More recent writers have been perhaps too ready to accept his representations, and have used them to support their contention that Scottish Church affairs suffered greatly at this time from the evil influences of English "Sectaries" coming, as they allege, by way of Ireland. It may have been a fear of schism which moved a considerable number in the Assemblies to vote against the holding of these "Private Meetings." In their rigid ecclesiasticism they thought that all religious exercises, if in the least public, should only be carried on as ordinances of the Church. All else might result in a breaking off from the Church. It was a pity views, due to a limited outlook, were so largely held as to bring about the suppression of meetings which might have helped on the fuller realisation of a Reformed Church in a Reformed Land, at any rate of the latter.

It would have been better if the church authorities, instead of suppressing the meetings, had encouraged ministers to take the lead in them, especially if they were afraid of them developing on wrong lines. This was what had been done in Northern Ireland, to the spiritual benefit and edification of all concerned. In Scotland these "Private Meetings" might have brought a fresh inflow of spirituality into the Church.

IV

Another evidence of strong stirrings of religious life amongst the people was to be seen in, what we may call, the "Gathered" Communion. They were not an innovation belonging to our Period as was later alleged in "The True Representation," a pamphlet of propaganda issued by the Resolutioners in 1657, which also declared that they were carried on by the Protesters to keep up party faction. They had indeed been introduced in Northern Ireland, with much spiritual profit, as early as 1628 or earlier. Scottish ministers, who had served in Ireland, had recognised the great advantage of them, and on returning to their own country had inaugurated them in their own parishes. Of course this was a departure from use and wont. The accepted practice of the Church had been for the

Communion to be observed in a parish for the members of the Church of that parish. But to these "Gathered Communions," held in various places throughout the land where there were ardent and evangelically-minded ministers, the people came from neighbouring parishes, and some even from distant places. They were the occasions of a real festival of preaching. Two or three ministers would preach on the Saturday preceding the Communion Sunday, two or three would preach in connection with the administration of the Sacrament on the Sunday, and on the Monday following two or three would preach at what would be of the nature of thanksgiving services after the observances of the previous day. Thousands gathered at some of these Communion Seasons, far too many to be accommodated in the church, and consequently much of the preaching took place in the open-air.

It was to be expected that such striking and unconventional practices would meet with opposition from conservative ecclesiastics. The General Assembly of 1647 passed an Act against all wanderings of the people from their own parish churches. Thus it runs in the Act: "Ordeans every member to keep their own paroch Kirk, to communicate there in the Word and Sacraments." (Peterkin, p. 474.)

Happily the church authorities did not succeed here. The "Gathered Communions" still continued to be held. No doubt there were some disadvantages connected with them. One of these would be that the ministers who went to assist at them might have to cancel the service on a particular Sunday in their own parish. But the benefits to the people of those times, whatever undesirable accompaniments to these Communion Seasons may have developed in later days, far outweighed any disadvantages. One of the scandals of the times was the infrequent observance of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Ministers in some parishes had to be compelled by their Presbytery, it might be after the neglect of the ordinance in their parish for years, to hold celebrations of the Communion. Of course the ministers had their excuses for their remissness, but it would be hard to find any excuse which could be maintained as valid in most cases. Nicoll in his Diary relates in 1655: "It wald be rememberit, that these sex yeiris last past, the holy and blissed Communioun of the blissed body of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Chryst wes not celebrat within the toun of Edinburgh, nather yit within mony uther pairtes of the cuntrey, be reasoun of the trubles and sad conditioun of the land, and inward divisiounes among the ministrie and pepill in Scotland, in thair judgementis and opiniounes, till the end of Juliy 1655" (p. 155). But no disturbed state of the country was sufficient excuse for this neglect. The Sacrament can be held under the most disturbed conditions, when and where there are the right men to administer it.

The "Gathered Communions" helped to make up for that grievous

neglect in various places. The people from any parish were able to obtain the benefit of the observance of the Holy Supper at a parish church of which the minister was a zealous and earnest evangelical. This privilege could be open to them two or three times in the year, or oftener, if they were willing to journey to the places where these Communions were being held.

Further, at these "Gathered Communions," the people had the opportunity of listening to the preaching of some of the most eloquent evangelical ministers of the time. This would mean very much to those men and women whose homes were in parishes where the ministers were unevangelical or worldly-minded. We can think of the crowds listening to the fervent appeals of James Guthrie, or William Guthrie, or John Livingston, or Samuel Rutherford, or others like them. There was manifest spiritual result from such occasions. It is said that, at one of the early "Gathered Communions," one held at Shotts before our period had begun, after a sermon by John Livingston, 500 persons were converted.

In districts where the influences of these Communions, and where other like evangelical forces, were at work, we may well believe that here the well-known glowing description by Kirkton of the moral and religious state of the people about the year 1650, was not too much exaggerated. This at any rate might be approximately true which he said: "All learned, all prayed, most part were really godly."

V

We will now turn our attention for a short time in a very different direction. Among the most powerful forces working among the people, professedly without respect of persons, was the Discipline of the Church. It was the discipline in the narrow sense of the word, not that which embraces the whole ecclesiastical constitution and administration, but the judicial authority of the Church with its power of inflicting penalties. That the true Church must rightly have this authority and power was always maintained in the Reformed Churches. Not that they were peculiar in this respect. The Roman Church did and does make the same claim. Something of the kind, too, one may remark, is suggested in the New Testament. Naturally the Church of Scotland after the Reformation, like other Reformed Churches, claimed this prerogative, and strove to carry out such discipline as was characteristic of its church order. With the bringing in of the Second Reformation a like method of discipline was revived as a necessary part of the functioning of the reconstituted Church. Perhaps if anything it became more active and was now used more often politically than it had been previously. As formerly, it took within its

scope cases which seem to us more suitable for a civil court than for an ecclesiastical. One can hardly think it was good for the spiritual ministration of the Church among the people that it had often to bear the onus of the ill-feeling which judgment in such cases often creates. It would have been better if the Church had kept strictly to its own sphere of judging in matters of faith and church order and religious practices. But it did not. It quite often took proceedings against those who were offending rather politically or criminally than in the religious sphere. Of course, the dividing line was often rather indistinct. The way of penalising was also sometimes too severe. Moreover, there could be too much prejudice and too little justice. During the short time that the Resolutioners were in control of the judicatories, penal discipline against their opponents seemed both arbitrary and vindictive. At no time did stern disciplinary activity win favour to the Church. Yet there may have been some gain to the moral improvement of the people from the Church's taking in hand various cases which we would consider belonged to the civil courts. The country had not yet fully emerged from the superstition, and corruptions, and moral laxness of the later Middle Ages. Under James VI progress had been slowed up. In dealing with corruptions of all kinds the Church could exercise a greater moral authority in those days than the secular judges and courts. But when all things are considered, useful as the Church's Discipline might be even in criminal cases, it worked against its spiritual effectiveness in other ways. Even in Scotland, where the people were more accustomed to the Church courts, there would be no love felt by the rank and file for the Discipline. It was to escape it, and to have more freedom, that some moved towards Independency. There is a manifesto included by Nicoll in his Diary which purports to be the protest of some averse from the Discipline: "Quhairas we, undersubscryvers of the paroches of &c, having by many sad experiencis, fund the bloodie and barbarous inconvenientis quich hath always accompaneyed the Presbyteriall government, by thair mixed autoritie with the civill power, and tyrannous persecuting of mens consciencis . . . For these reasones, we do heirby thairfoir declair, that we nather can nor will continue memberis of Presbyteriall governement, and that we sall no moir esteme of thair censures than formerlie all guid Christianes did esteme of Popes excommunicationes . . ." (Diary, p. 91.) For similar reasons Robert Leighton appears to have lost approval of the Church Judicatories, as in conversation he said to Alexander Brodie, that: "Much persecution was there upon our imposing upon one another, as if we were infallible, allowing none that differed from us in the least Measure. He thought the Lord would break that which we would so fain hold up, our Judicatories: He had observed so much of our own Spirit in them these many years past, that he had lothed them for the most

part, and wearied of them." One may remark here that Leighton later ranged himself on the side of much harsher judicatories.

In England it was that Discipline which was claimed to be a necessary function of the Presbyterian Church, which was probably one of the main causes working to prevent the Church of England from becoming established as Presbyterian. The English Parliament would not agree to allow so much judicial power to be exercised by the Church. Many of the people were strongly opposed to it. Conceivably it was this which moved Cromwell and others towards Independency. The dislike of the Church's discipline is shown in the well-known lines of Milton's ode :

" Dare ye for this adjure the civil sword
To force our consciences that Christ set free,
And ride us with a Classic Hierarchy,

.

When they shall read this clearly in your charge :
New *Presbyter* is but old *Priest* writ large."

It seems that shortly before the Restoration the proposal was made in England to reissue the Confession of Faith with the section on discipline omitted.

The exercise of the Discipline still continued in Scotland, and that for many years to come. There was behind it the belief that it is possible to make good and worthy citizens and church members by force. It might act with negative effect to restrain evil-doers. But the belief that men and women would be made good Presbyterians, and Protestants, and Christians, by force, when put into practice, could not have the highest and best results. People are not made the best type of Christians by compulsion.

VI

It has already been mentioned that the Church of Scotland, in accepting from the Westminster Assembly the document, the Form of Presbyterian Church Government, had not much need for it, for it was already organised with the full Presbyterian Constitution, Kirk Sessions, Presbyteries, Provincial Assemblies or Synods, and with the General Assembly supreme over all. It does not appear to have taken long after the inauguration of the Second Reformation, for the Church to be functioning in the recognised system through its courts. In 1642, however, there was felt to be the need for a special executive for the Church. The General Assembly met only once a year. The times were troublous. There were important matters which were continually arising which required to be dealt with

much more expeditiously than could be done by a yearly Assembly. So a body was appointed by the General Assembly to act in its name, with very full and almost independent powers, except that it would have to give an account of its stewardship to the next year's Assembly. Beginning in 1642 each Assembly following up to 1652 appointed its yearly Commission of Assembly, as this executive body was called. At the first, the setting up of this Commission was looked on as a questionable innovation. It seemed hardly to belong rightly to the Presbyterian system. But the needs of the times seemed to call for it, and so it came into being. It had four stated times for meeting in the year, but practically it was free to meet at any time whenever it was thought advisable to call its members together. The number placed upon it by each Assembly was fairly large. The number of those actually wont to be present at its meetings was comparatively small, sometimes very small.

It is surprising to us what power and authority the Commission wielded. We have nothing like it in our church constitution. The present Commission of Assembly is not by any means similar. It could settle the transference of ministers from one parish to another. It authorised and enjoined collections to be made throughout the Church. It was the chief instrument of Discipline. It could decree excommunications to be carried out. It could order the deposition or suspension of ministers. It gave authoritative notice for the observance of fasts throughout the land. It was the recognised body to treat with the Parliament and the Committee of Estates about any church or state concerns. Through its dealings with the secular authorities it had considerable control in political affairs. In the Church its acting members were spoken of as being on the "watch-tower," for they were considered as being on the look-out for whatever might be injurious to the welfare of the Church and the religious life of the people. Accordingly they would at times send out warnings to Synods, Presbyteries, and to the people in general. From all this it can be clearly seen how important and influential a part these Commissions had in the life and work of the Church and the religious life of the people, and even in the affairs of the State.

There seems to have been little or no tendency to dispute the authority of the Commission before the unhappy conflict between Resolutioners and Protesters had begun. Occasionally individual ministers abstained from giving out the proclamations from their pulpits which they had been enjoined to do by the Commission. They had to answer for their insubordination. In 1650 there was almost a revolt of some of the Fife ministers, but this passed off. Such cases were exceptional, and the usual ready acquiescence in this authority is surprising, especially considering it was being exerted often by just a few men. It would not be

too much to say that the authoritative administration of the Commissions of the General Assembly was the distinguishing feature of the Church in the first part of our period.

Looking now at the Church of Scotland fully organised and equipped, as it was by the end of ten years after the bringing in of the Second Reformation, and with that executive which has just been described, one may speculate what its future course might have been like if it had continued to go on developing along the lines as now laid down. After having fully established its character and principles as a Reformed Church, would it have become a much greater evangelic power in the land? Would a missionary zeal for the conversion of the heathen, coming on more than 150 years before the missionary enthusiasm did arise in the Church, have been stirred up, stronger than the desire for the Presbyterian uniformity of the three Nations? We cannot say. It might have been so. Considering, however, the earnest desire of many in those times for a thorough purging of the Church in its ministry, courts, and membership, this at least might have been brought about, a state of affairs which more closely would have conformed to the "Ideal" of a Reformed Church in a Reformed Land.

VII

After the death of Charles I, Church and State in Scotland espoused the cause of his son, the Prince Charles. This led to the invasion of Scotland and its ultimate occupation by Cromwell's armies. It also brought about a religious and political situation which gave rise to two conflicting Parties in the Church, and these largely became responsible for the religious influences and conditions prevailing in the land for the time being. The two Parties came to be called Resolutioners and Protesters. The conflict between them was deplorable and bitter. It will not be possible in this essay to go into the political and religious causes which gave rise to the two parties, nor to give details of their contentions here. But it has always to be borne in mind as one considers the religious conditions and influences of this Period, that this bitter conflict having arisen in the Church, continued and affected the state of the Church and even of the personal religious life of many of the people. Between the disappearance of Charles II from the Scottish scene in 1651 and his Restoration in 1660, several attempts to heal the breach in the Church were made, but without success.

There can be no doubt that this unhappy conflict was detrimental to the Church itself and injurious to religion in general. It certainly was anything but helpful to the functioning of the Church. Before it began

the Church judicatories had a remarkable power, and their moral and spiritual authority was very high. But by reason of the strife and the manipulation of them by one of the Parties, these courts lost much of the respect they once enjoyed. The Resolutioners were the Party to blame for this. The destruction, too, of the unity of the Church by an internal conflict, weakened it for resistance to its opponents. If it had been united, and it had carried the majority of the nation with it, as in all probability it would have done, it might have made an effective stand against the later subversive reaction under Charles II.

There is reason also to believe that by reason of the church conflict the cause of true religion suffered considerably among the people in general. The leading men in the Church were contending against each other instead of directing all their energies for the furtherance of the mission of the Church throughout the whole land. It was crying out for the utmost Christian effort. There were deplorable religious conditions, particularly in some parts of the Highlands. For example, the state of Lochaber was notorious, and yet ministers could hardly be obtained to go there. Parts of the Lowlands might be almost as needy religiously.

Yet it has to be said that, in spite of all, religion did flourish in not a few districts. That there had been revivals has already been referred to. The grievous differences in the Church did not bring about a cessation of the preaching of the Gospel. Where there was a warmly evangelical ministry the churches were crowded. Catechizing went on amongst old and young. Family worship was still earnestly promoted. Towards the better understanding of the Scriptures, commentaries, written by some of the ablest ministers chosen for the work, were being published. Books which were aids to the religious life were being issued, such as *The Sum of Saving Knowledge*, and Guthrie's *The Christian's Great Interest*. In the Highlands a metrical version of the Psalms in the Gaelic was being prepared, and part was already in use. Also portions of the Scriptures were being translated for the benefit of the Highland people. From all the above efforts and activities there could not fail to be some more or less abundant spiritual results, and there were saintly people both in the ministry and in the ordinary membership of the Church, not perfect by any means, some woefully subject to the defects of their times, but worthy of much commendation and admiration.

Yet one thinks how much better the religious state of affairs might have been if there had not been the acrimonious strife between Resolutioners and Protesters. Their conflict did affect adversely both the Christian cause in general and the Reformed Church in particular. It did harm to the movement for a Reformed or Presbyterian Church in England. Very naturally and readily it might be thought by many

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English people that, if Presbytery in Scotland, where it was so well organised, could show no better results than what they saw there, why should they be enthusiastic about it in England. Simeon Ash, a leading London Presbyterian minister, writing to Samuel Rutherford on the subject in January, 1657, said: "The sad differences amongst Presbyterian brethren in Scotland which your letter to me suggesteth, are no lesse greivous to your Presbyterian friends here, than joyous to such who both on the right and left hand doe with detestation decrye the Presbyterian government." (*Consultations*, I, 288.)

We glance again at the two conflicting Parties. They both had much in common. Both professed strong attachment to the Reformed or Presbyterian Church. They accepted the same Confession of Faith and theology. They both affirmed that they faithfully adhered to the Covenants. But it was just in their reading of these that one main cause of the antagonism to each other appeared, and the divisive elements in the Covenants can be observed. Those clauses which affirmed loyalty to the king were what the Resolutioners practically came to lay the most stress on. So much did they do so that the Protesters accused them of placing the interests of the king before the prerogatives of Christ in His Church. The Protesters themselves sought to lay the most stress on the religious claims of the Covenants. On the whole, of the two Parties, they were the more spiritually-minded. The Resolutioners, no doubt, had some good and godly men amongst them. But the majority which gave them the control in the Church was, sad to say in view of the "Ideal," too largely made up of men inclined for royalist-prelacy, and had in it too many lax in their duties, and not a few who were evil in character. Broghil, the Lord President of the Scottish Council, who was a patron and favourer of the Resolutioners, spoke of them as having too many amongst them "not fit for the calling of a minister of the Gospel." (Quoted in the Introduction to Wariston's Diary, III, p. xviii, from Thurloe, IV, 557.)

If both parties were with sincerity equally devoted to the carrying out of that "Ideal" of a Reformed Church in a Reformed Land, certainly the Protesters were more politically wise and saw more clearly what in State affairs would be inimical to the furtherance of their high purposes. They soon came to see that there was nothing to hope for, and all to fear, from the second Charles getting into power. If the Resolutioners had a like enthusiasm for attaining to, and maintaining, this "Ideal" (many of them certainly had not), then they were utterly blind, for the policy they were pursuing was of such a kind as to give the power in State and Church to those who were the enemies of the "Ideal." The argument they always used in defence of their willingness to admit "Malignants"

into controlling positions in the army and elsewhere was, that the safety of the country required it. They were thus allowing a very natural, but lower, instinctive patriotism to endanger all that they themselves, as well as others, had professed was best for the highest Christian good of Scotland. These words hold good for nations as well as for individuals: "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." A higher patriotism founded on that exalted exhortation would have made the Resolutioners act very differently. The Protesters, on the other hand, had perhaps more of this higher patriotism. They claimed that God must be put first, and that Christ's interests must come before all else in His Church and in the land.

VIII

Further, with regard to the deplorable division in the Church, it might possibly have vanished away if an entirely different ecclesiastical atmosphere had been created. It is conceivable that this might have been brought about, after the Battle of Worcester and the later dissolution of the General Assembly, if successful efforts had been made to come to terms with Cromwell. The main causes of the antagonism of the two Parties had ceased with the removal of Charles and with no Assembly to dispute about. There can be little doubt about it that Cromwell from the first would willingly have conciliated Scotland, if he could have done so. He seems to have been ready to be friendly with both rulers and people. He would rather have liked to claim for himself some connection with Scotland, if we can gather so much from a pleasant story told about him during his stay in Scotland, which is related by Carlyle (*Centenary Edition*, II, 305). He had remarked that "his mother was a Stewart's daughter, and he had a relation to the name." In general his friendly advances were coldly repulsed. Zealous Covenanters were moved by what they persuaded themselves was a righteous censuring of him. He was called "a blasphemous usurper." It was alleged that he was intending to overturn the Church order in Scotland, and to bring in a wicked toleration whereby a flood of blasphemous heresies would overwhelm the land. Undoubtedly he was in favour of a toleration, and was opposed to the persecution of any on account of their religious beliefs. In his attitude, which many have approved of since, he was before his time. He would also offend careful churchmen by his preference for the scanty church organization of the Independents. Yet his maturer general church policy in Scotland seems to have been, not to overthrow the Scottish Church as constituted, but at the most to procure an unhindered footing in Scotland for those who preferred to differ from the main Church. In Holland,

Independents from England had been permitted to settle down and have their churches, and they had done no harm to the Dutch Reformed Church nor to the religious life of the people. Of course to Scotland they had come with greater proselytizing intentions than they had gone to Holland, yet would the results have been worse in Scotland? One can hardly think so, for the Scottish people for the most part approved of their fully organised Church, and the Scottish mind did not so readily as the English mind accept an indefinite and formless character for a Christian Communion, especially for a National Church, as the Independency of the times seemed to involve. It is true under the Cromwellian rule the General Assembly had been suppressed. But that probably would not have happened if it had remained a free Court, and had not been taken possession of by those who had been the chief supporters of Charles, of whom probably not a few were still ready to intrigue on his behalf. The Cromwellians were suspicious of the Assembly. Their secret service may have informed them against it. All the other courts of the Church were allowed to continue as before.

However, irreconcilableness with Cromwell persisted in Scotland. It showed itself in various ways. From the beginning of his government in the land, somewhat diminishing as time went on, it was looked on as not merely unpatriotic, but as sinful, to accept office under his Government in Scotland. Those doing so were held to be unfaithful to the Covenants, and were furthering that evil toleration which would work so much harm. With an entire want of discrimination Cromwell and all his officials, army officers and soldiers, were classed as blasphemous "Sectaries." Yet most of them, including Cromwell himself, were not "Sectaries" in any evil sense of the word, and certainly not blasphemous. The greater part of them were sober Independents, who would probably have been willing to accept most of the Confession of Faith, and could be classed as moderate Calvinists. In the army, although members of the strange sects were tolerated, they were not favoured. As time went on Quakers and Anabaptists were gradually discharged because they were inclined to insubordination. The men and officers were on the whole more religious (of course there were evil exceptions) than perhaps of any army which had been previously gathered together. The army, too, was under strict discipline. Offences committed against the people of the country, as well as military ones, were very severely punished. The soldiers carried about with them their "Soldiers' Catechism" and "The Soldiers' Pocket Bible." As for Cromwell, those who read his letters can hardly be otherwise persuaded, than that he was fully up to the Christian level of his times. The minister, John Owen, who went to Scotland with Cromwell as his chaplain, was well known as a scholar and an earnest Christian. To speak of all these as being like "Turks and Infidels," or opprobriously

to refer to them as "blasphemous Sectaries," as leaders in the Church did, was, to say the least, reprehensible.

The ministers were among the most bitterly irreconcilable to the Cromwellians. We can hardly approve of the attitude they adopted towards men of the same Christian faith with themselves. It was unworthy of themselves, for some of them were saintly men and prepared to suffer much for Christ and His Church. Yet one can readily think of explanations of their conduct. No doubt it was very galling to our ancestors to behold Cromwellian control in their beloved land. Besides, also, they had a very great dread, whether rightly or wrongly, that Cromwell, contrary to their deepest convictions about the freedom of the Church, and of the Headship of Christ in it, would interfere with State regulations in an Erastian way. He was inclined to interfere, it must be admitted. With all this dread we can sympathise. There is also a further consideration. It must have been very exasperating to Presbyteries to have the possibility of their rulings and discipline being thwarted by the appeal of delinquents to the Cromwellian authorities. Take for example the case of Sir Alexander Irving, of Drum. (*Scotland and the Commonwealth*, pp. 348-357.) But weighing all such extenuating circumstances we have not found what sufficiently excuses this seriously unworthy behaviour on the part of the church-leaders. It has just to be put down as an example of the strange inconsistencies which are sometimes to be found among Christian people. This further can be said about it. It was impolitic as well as being below the highest Christian behaviour.

Cromwell early took it upon him, in some "Queries" which he sent to the Governor of Edinburgh Castle to remonstrate with those who were guilty of being falsely abusive. "Whether," writes he, "your carrying on of reformation, so much by you spoken of, have [has] not probably been subject to some mistakes in your own judgments about some parts of the same—laying so much stress thereupon as hath been a temptation to you even to break the law of Love—towards your brethren, and those whom Christ hath regenerated, even to the reviling and persecuting of them." (*Carlyle*, II, 238.)

If after the Battle of Worcester and the later suppression of the General Assembly, when affairs were beginning to settle down in Scotland, the leaders in Church and State had tried to come to terms with Cromwell, if they had ceased dallying with and hankering after Charles, and the ministers had cheerfully given up praying for him in the churches, and there had ceased all plotting on the part of responsible people to restore him, and if there had been given to Cromwell an assured guarantee that there would be no invasion from Scotland on behalf of Charles, then it is quite conceivable that Cromwell would have withdrawn his forces from

Scotland, for it would have seemed to him that there was no longer any danger from the Northern Kingdom to the existing rule and government in England. He had early in the invasion hinted at a certain willingness that way. Later he clearly seems to have been ready to proceed along those lines. The Editor of *The Cromwellian Union*, in a footnote to p. lviii, gives this quotation: "Before returning to Scotland (Feby. 1655) the Scottish members, or, more probably, those of them who were not English officers or officials, visited Cromwell to take their leave and to represent how burdensome was the maintenance of the English army in Scotland. 'His Highness told them that the reason thereof was because the Ministry did preache uppe the interest of Charles Stuart, and did much inveigh against the present authority, soe that there was a necessity of their continuance, but if they could propose any expedient with a salvo to the security of that Nation, hee was willinge to answer their desires therein; wheruppon the said Members are now consideringe of an expedient' (*Clarke Papers*, ed. Firth, vol. iii, p. 22)."

If only that "consideringe" had been followed up resolutely the course of history might have been changed. It might have meant a little stooping for Scotland, but it would have been a stooping to conquer. Certainly the leaders of the Church had more reason to hope for advantage to the Reformed Church from Cromwell than from Charles, even if he were an Independent and one who believed in a toleration of "Sectaries." From Cromwell there was less danger to their Church "Ideal" than from him who had been called the "chief Malignant." That was what Protesters and others had recognised for some years back. Moreover, Cromwell is said to have become more inclined to favour the Presbyterians towards the end of his rule. Baillie has something to that effect (*Letters*, III, 362). Cromwell might even have come to further the realisation of the great scheme for a Presbyterian uniformity of religion in the British Isles, or at the least he might have ceased to hinder it going forward. With such easing in public affairs, with such lessening of the burden of the State which was killing him, as would probably have resulted from the developing of these more settled conditions in national religious concerns, Cromwell's life might have been prolonged and so, under his rule, time given for the new order to become established. In Scotland a better religious atmosphere would have been created in which differences such as those between Resolutioners and Protesters would have faded away. The Reformed Church would have been saved and Scotland would have been delivered from its troubles.

But events were not to take the course we have been imagining. It is futile for us to consider the might-have-beens. The tragedy partly brought about by political and religious blindness occurred. The Restora-

tion of the second Charles took place. When he obtained the authority and power of the kingship, he cast down as much as he could of what had been rebuilt in the preceding years in accord with Scotland's Reformation "Ideal."

Happily all was not lost. There was a remnant absolutely determined to uphold the Covenants. Here was one good result at any rate which may be perceived to have arisen out of the sore strife between the two Parties in the Church. In the course of it there was brought out more clearly what were the issues before the religious people of the country. Thus the Covenanters had learned to know what it was they had to strive for. So they strove to the end, and we know with what result.